

CULTURE, TRIBE, SOCIETY

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such facts of common life which would link the whole tribe we find only one—a weak potential link, determining individual action only, namely, the rule of hospitality which every Nupe must extend to his fellow tribesmen (but which he would not refuse to strangers).¹ Otherwise the common life that exists in Nupe takes its course in a very much more narrow compass, in scattered villages, towns, or groups of villages—small circles on the spacious tribal map.

Politically the Nupe people are scattered over several 'countries', seven Emirates and chieftainships to-day, and four or five in pre-European times. Even the ancient Nupe kingdom has not, as far as our evidence goes, included the whole group; sections of Nupe have always lived outside its boundaries, and other tribes or tribal sections beside the Nupe have formed the nationals of these countries of Nupe. To-day the largest of them is Bida Emirate with a population of 171,458, the core of the ancient kingdom of Nupe whose present rulers still take the title *Etsu Nupe*, King of Nupe. Some of the other, smaller Nupe states are ruled by independent kings (in modern terminology, Emirs): Patigi and Lafiagi, comprising an area of 3,023 square miles and a population of 90,702, and Agaie and Lapai, with an area of 2,587 square miles, and populations of 24,174 and 25,000, respectively. Other Nupe territories are but small chieftainships, political districts, under the rulership of Hausa, Yoruba, or Gbira kings: Zuguma (with a population of 5,000) under the Hausa Emir of Kontagora, Shonga and Shari (appr. 17,000) under the Fulani-Yoruba Emir of Ilorin, and Eggā and its hinterland (5,000) under the *Atta* of Gbira. In Bida, Patigi, Lafiagi, and Agaie the Nupe represent the vast majority of the population; in Kontagora, Lapai, Ilorin, and Gbira they are a small minority, living side by side with Hausa, Yoruba, Yagba, Gbiri, Kakanda, and Gbira.

If the Nupe tribe is thus not a local group in the strict sense of the word, it is not a linguistic unit either. Nupe is spoken to-day by the bilingual Gbiri of Paiko and Lapai and the Kakanda on the Niger. On the other hand, some of the split-off sections and colonies of Nupe, though still laying claim to tribal membership, have abandoned and forgotten their mother tongue. True, these facts reflect only comparatively recent historical changes. But language as such, in its very structure and organization, proves the same divergence between the two social realities, tribe and linguistic group. Nupe language belongs to the group of Sudanese languages, and within this category forms, together with Ibo, Edo, Ijo, Andoni, and Yoruba, the '*Kwa*-group' of West African languages.² Nupe is related more closely, in structure and vocabulary, to Gbiri and Kakanda (I am speaking here only of languages which I have studied myself). But to speak of Nupe language pure and simple is incorrect. There exist to-day five markedly different dialects: a dialect which we will term Nupe proper, and the dialects of Ebe, Zitako, Bassa,

¹ There exists a fine distinction, though: fellow-tribesmen who claim hospitality are, where possible, given a sleeping hut to spend the night in, and are often invited to share a meal with their hosts; strangers sleep in the entrance hut of the compound.

² See D. Westermann, *Africa*, viii, p. 145, 1935.

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621 successor to the chieftainship (it being thought inadvisable to depose the
 622 once appointed chief). At the same time the elders promoted him to the
 182 highest village rank next to the chief's, *Tsadu*. Having been granted this
 responsible position in the village government, the ex-rival of the chief
 seems prepared to use his influence and moral power in support of the
 official Village Head whom he may succeed some day.

This book cannot venture to answer the question how far the authority
 of the traditional chief can be strained without alienating him from the
 people and the elders, or without forcing the latter to abandon their role
 as free spokesmen of the community and become mere pawns of the
 chief.¹ But it must be said that in many respects the adoption of new
 governmental duties by the traditional chiefs is proceeding smoothly
 and efficiently. This readjustment seems due less to political measures
 as such than to the comprehensive effectiveness of culture change,
 which gradually diminishes certain divergences in the views to which the
 political executive is committed and those of the people themselves.
 Already many Nupe villagers appreciate medical help and education,
 and are sending their children to school without pressure from the chief.

For completeness' sake we must add that the balance of 'multiple
 control' may be endangered also by the opposite development, namely
 a separation between political executive and community in which the
 latter represents the new extraneous influences. For individuals or
 sections of the community may dissociate themselves from the unity of
 common life, alienated by modern education, new economic enterprise,
 or conversion to Christianity, and may thus no longer be amenable to
 the traditional authorities. However, this danger has not yet arisen in
 the Nupe village, chiefly because the 'progressive' elements flock to the
 town rather than stay in the village, and also because Christian influence
 is inconsiderable.

621 Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the factors that weaken the
 622 homogeneous village community are all of recent date and the results
 182 of modern colonial development. Disturbances of the 'balance' very
 631 similar to those just described, and like them entailing a strengthening
 from outside, as it were, of the chief's authority, were also at work in the
 pre-British Nupe kingdom. They are embodied in the very existence of
 the kingdom as a political and social superstructure which is the carrier
 of new values and new, manifold, cultural influences.

First the purely political factors. We have heard of the insignia and
 emblems of chiefly power which, according to tradition, were bestowed
 on village chiefs by the ancestor-king of Nupe; the most ancient form of

¹ It is possible that in communities in which the 'multiple' system of control is
 less delicately adjusted, and the political authority of the chief more independent
 of the other principles governing community life, the political power of chief and
 elders can be used more freely for new tasks. This adds, I think, a new meaning
 to the following statement by Sir Donald Cameron: 'The Native Authorities
 Ordinance also makes provision for the limitation in particular instances of the
 powers which may be exercised by a Native Authority, for some of these are well
 organized and experienced while others are of . . . weaker mould.' ('Native
 Administration in Nigeria and Tanganyika', *Journal of the Royal African Society*,
 xxxvi, Supplement, p. 13.)

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village chieftainship is thus thought of as an office held 'by the grace of the king'. I have also mentioned that the appointment of the village chief is subject, to-day as of old, to confirmation by the *Etsu* Nupe. The chief thus becomes the official representative of the king, responsible to him for law and order and the collection of tax, but also able to rely on his sovereign's spiritual or political support. The people of the village can appeal to the *Etsu* if they are dissatisfied with their chief, and in the case of rival claims to chieftainship the king would be called upon to decide between the claimants—a role which he did not always undertake impartially; bribes offered by a chief threatened with the loss of his position or a new claimant would easily influence his decision.¹ The control of the king over his chiefs is expressed already in the ceremonial of the appointment. The chief-elect, accompanied by the head elders, would be summoned to the capital to receive his appointment and to be vested with a gown, turban, and sandals as insignia of his office, in a ceremony which closely resembles the investiture of officers of state or members of the royal nobility. The *Etsu* Nupe may also be called in to arbitrate in internal disputes, e.g. over the succession to local ranks—we remember the example from Doko. Lastly, legal cases come under the jurisdiction of the *Etsu* and his appointed agents, thus removing from the orbit of the community the right to see offences punished and retaliation achieved.

Another source of 'disturbance' lies in the impact of Islam. It led in many cases to a spiritual separation of chief and community, for many chiefs embraced Islam (at least nominally) long before the rest of the people. Thus these chiefs can no longer organize, and rarely even show interest in, the traditional religious ceremonies which weld the community into a single congregation. Nor can they base their authority, hereditary or not, on that spiritual commonness of which it was once an expression. They rely instead more or less openly on the closer association with the Mohammedan rulers of the country with whom they now share the creed—at least one feature of their exalted position. In its ever-increasing scope of proselytizing, Islam drives the wedge of another class distinction into the structure of village society. The distinction between Mohammedans and pagans in a village often has this effect, that the two sections differ not only in religious observances, but also in general mode of life, dress, important food habits (Mohammedans do not drink sorghum-beer, the traditional ceremonial drink of the Nupe peasants), their—often imaginary—educational qualification and, again, in the degree of the affinity they could claim to the highest social stratum in the country.

In other spheres of life—economic, educational—similar influences are at work, striking at the very roots of social homogeneity. But we may cut short our description; we shall meet with these influences again later. Our present discussion has established the main facts. For at least a century and a half the Nupe village did not exist in that self-centred, secure isolation in which the balance of its social system could fulfil

¹ Bribes to the *Etsu* are said to have played an important part in gaining the assent of the king when the new chiefs of Doko usurped the chieftainship.

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CHAPTER VIII

POLITICAL HISTORY OF NUPE KINGDOM

(continued)

THE FEUDAL STATE

WE have seen how in the history of the kingdom a certain territorial nucleus evolved, an area of 'Nupe proper'. This concept of a territorial 'nucleus' also forms the basis of the division of the country for the purpose of government. For the purposes of political, judicial, and tax administration the kingdom was divided into four zones. First, the area of the conquered tributary countries outside the boundaries of the 'kingdom proper', in Nupe terminology, the countries of the *za'zi kati*, the 'Outside Peoples'. Second, within these boundaries, an innermost core, the countries of Beni and Kyedye; having formed the nucleus of the rising kingdom they are now assigned the privileged position of royal domains. The third zone comprised the wider 'ring' of remaining towns and districts of the kingdom, most of which lie in Trans-Kaduna. Bida town, the seat of the central government, formed an administrative district of its own.

Under the name of Outside Peoples were comprised the conquered territories of Gbari, Gbira, Kamperi, Kakanda, Yagba, Bunu, and certain sections of Nupe (Dibo and Ebe mostly). These districts were not administered fully by the central government. Their political dependence entailed two things: an annual tribute to Bida, and the recognition by other Emirates and chieftainships of the political status of these territories as 'under the protection' of Bida. It was a one-sided 'protection': Bida itself was free to raid her own outside peoples, but no other country could do this or levy taxes in these territories with impunity. The guarantor of these 'treaties' was, in the last instance, the Emir of Gwandu, the highest feudal overlord of all Fulani Emirs in this part of the world.¹ The central government in Bida did not assume jurisdiction over these countries, nor did it interfere in their own political administration. The tribute was paid in slaves and was collected annually by royal messengers, *tuci*, or as they were also called *ajele* (from the Arabic *ajala*, to dispatch), who visited these countries at the head of small armies, ready to quell any disturbance or to bring recalcitrant taxpayers to heel. Of the tribute levied a little more than half went to the king, the rest to the royal messenger. The office of tax-collector in the outside areas of the kingdom was entrusted mostly to the royal nobility, and the districts over which they were put in charge were linked with

¹ Such an 'international' agreement existed, for example, between the *Etsu* Nupe, the *Sarkin Sudan* (the Emir of Kontagora), and the Emir of Zaria with respect to Gbari country. These treaties were not always kept by the parties concerned. Thus the *Etsu* of Agaie used to raid the territories of his brother Emir, the *Etsu* Nupe, and had eventually to be stopped by a big war which was led by the Emir of Gwandu himself.

The rest of Nupe Kingdom was divided up into smaller and larger POLITICAL HISTORY OF NUPE KINGDOM 117

'countries' comprising each a town with its dependent villages and *tunga* which were administered as fiefs through feudal lords or *egba*. The *egba*—a member of the royal house or of the office nobility, or a court slave—received the fief from the king together with his rank with which the fief remained permanently linked. Mokwa was known as the town of the *Shaba*, Eggā as the town of the *Ndeji*, Kutigi and Enagi belonged to the *Ndatwaki*, and so on. Promotion to a higher rank brought with it appointment to another, more lucrative, fief. The feudal lord himself lived in the capital and rarely visited his possession. The local affairs, the collection of tax, were in charge of his representative, one of his slaves or serfs who was residing on his lands as *egbagi*, Small Delegate. Of the tax collected in these fiefs, again a money tax, a quarter went to the king and three-quarters were retained by the *egba*, who returned a small share to his *egbagi*, salary and commission in one. Sometimes the towns or districts also paid an additional tribute in kind both to *Etsu* and *egba*. I have been able to collect some data about the tax levied in these areas. The uniform information which I obtained from different sources leads me to believe that the facts are substantially correct. The town Kutigi, according to my informants, paid under *Etsu* Umaru a money tax of 20,000 cowries (about 10s.) to the *Etsu* through the *egba*; to the *egba* himself 10,000 cowries (5s.) and to the *egbagi* 5,000 cowries (2s. 6d.). In addition to this, the people of Kutigi sent the *Etsu* 20 mats of the kind which has made Kutigi the centre of a famous mat industry, worth over £1, 4 bundles of corn worth about 7s. 'for the king's horses', and 10 mats and 1 bundle of corn to the *egba*. In modern money, the total tax of the town which at that time had eight *efu* and a population of perhaps 500, amounted to between £2 and £3.¹

The feudal lord in Bida was responsible to the king for law and order in his district. The appointment of the village chief was, again, subject to royal confirmation. The overlordship of the king also implied the right of appeal of the villagers to the king against oppression or injustice from their feudal lord.² Lastly, the *egbagi*, together with the village chief, administered justice in the smaller cases and sent all bigger cases to Bida, where the *egba* himself would plead the case of his tenants before the court of *Etsu* and *Alkali*.

A variety of the fiefs just discussed were bestowed on individuals, relatives, courtiers, or favourites of the king, as personal fiefs, independent of rank and office. Even women could hold fiefs of this kind. These fiefs were sometimes hereditary and sometimes reclaimed by the king after the death of the holder. They were very small, single towns or villages, but one person could hold two or more such fiefs—which, however, were never adjacent lest the power in the hands of one person

¹ Oldfield reports that in 1832-4 (i.e. under *Etsu* Usman) Eggā, one of the largest towns of Nupe at that time, paid an annual tax of 120,000 cowries, that is, about £3 (Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., ii, p. 39). This fits in very well with the data I obtained.

² The people of Mokwa once availed themselves of this right to lodge a complaint against their feudal lord. When I asked my informants what the result had been, they shrugged their shoulders and said: 'The *Etsu* promised to help us; but does one Fulani go against another Fulani?'

631 became too great. The towns or villages which were granted as such
 651 personal fiefs could lie anywhere within the boundary of the kingdom, on
 554 the royal domains as well as in the areas held as office fiefs by *egba*. The
 personal fiefs involved no legal or administrative authority, only the
 authority of levying an additional tax called *edugi* (small tax) over and
 above the royal tax, *edukó* (big tax), after the latter had been collected.
 There was no limitation to this additional tax, which must often have
 exploited the peasants ruthlessly. Yet I have also seen close personal
 attachment between villages and their lord still existing to-day, bearing
 witness to the existence of more friendly ties between feudal lord and
 tenants.

631 It is clearly impossible to state in more detail how this administrative
 554 system worked, and especially how far the administrative and judicial
 authority of the feudal delegate worked in harmony with the existing
 traditional authority vested in village chief and elders. Later on, I shall
 give more data about the working of this legal machinery. But it is easy to
 understand that the powerful feudal lord and his delegate could uphold
 political and legal authority by the very fact of their power and influence.
 They could, for example, secure redress or punishment where the village
 chief's limited power might be too weak to enforce judgement or arbitration.
 But this intervention might easily distort justice rather than
 further it. As aliens, never linked permanently with the people over
 whom they rule, the fief-holders were bad guardians of tribal law and
 traditional justice. This, in fact, reflects the fundamental conflict in-
 volved in the system of feudal administration. The feudal lords were
 officially responsible for the well-being of their subjects; they were
 agents of a central authority which was vitally interested in the main-
 tenance of peace and order; they themselves, like their royal master,
 depended on the people of the fief for tax, supply of food, and supply of
 men for their armies and wars. But the connexion of fief with rank, in-
 volving as it did a change of the fief with every promotion, did not allow
 the mutual attachment between the feudal lord and his subjects to grow
 really strong and permanent—too strong and permanent for the safety of
 the king and the unity of the state. To balance the danger that might
 arise from a too firmly entrenched feudal lord, the kingdom had to risk
 the other danger of maladministration and discontent among the people
 on the fiefs.

642 This policy of preserving the balance of power between dynastic and
 631 feudal interests which had to be re-established and readjusted with every
 change of régime is reflected in the many changes which the administra-
 tion of the kingdom has undergone in the hundred years of Fulani rule.
Etsu Masaba, intent on building up an enormous dynastic power, divided
 the whole of Beni and Kusopa country, town for town, among his sons
 and daughters and other followers as personal fiefs. There was no place
 in the kingdom, the Nupe say, which had not its private 'owner'. The
 Nupe nicknamed this generous king *ndá na ma gá na*, Father of Dis-
 tributing. *Etsu* Umaru, who succeeded him, adopted the opposite policy
 in order to win the support of the native tribes against the feudal lords
 who had supported his predecessor. He abolished all private fiefs in

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Beni and re-established the integrity of the Beni confederacy in the form of a royal domain. *Etsu* Maliki, levying tax upon tax on a country depleted by civil war, and having to defend a weakened kingdom both against powerful feudal lords and a restive population, invented a new system of government: he now applied the *ajele* system which was formerly restricted to the Outside Peoples to the kingdom itself. He divided the country into six large districts placed in charge of his delegates—trusted slaves, who, accompanying the fief-holders on their tax-collecting expeditions from fief to fief, collected the royal tax at the head of an armed force strong enough to cow into submission rebellious subjects as well as any too independent feudal lords.¹ When *Etsu* Abubakari came to the throne, he found all the wells of supply dried up. The taxing system of his predecessors had left nothing in the country that could be made into money—nothing except human beings. He started raiding his own provinces to find slaves for the market, breaking down the most fundamental distinction of political status, that between the citizens of the kingdom proper and the conquered *zashi kati*. But, my informant added philosophically when he finished his sad story: 'A gown is dirty—you wash it; behold, the water is dirty—with what are you going to wash the water?'

In this ever-changing pattern of feudal administration the capital stands somewhat apart, being administered directly by the king and his officers of state. The threefold territorial and tribal division of the kingdom into an innermost core, a kingdom 'proper', and an outside area reappears on a smaller scale in the division of Bida and its population: here we have *ba nin*, the Inner City, where the Beni of pre-Fulani Bida live; the Greater Bida, and finally the Strangers' Quarter, *Idlemi*. But the order of status and prerogatives is not the same. Greater Bida included all the people who had come to Bida when it became the capital of the kingdom—the members of the ruling class, Fulani and Nupe nobility, with all their followers, hangers-on, with traders, Mallams, warriors, drummers. A privileged class here again, this group was free from all taxation, and this privilege also extended to all settlements which they founded, the *tunga* in the country, which were worked by their dependants, slaves, and serfs. The Nupe craft-guilds which had come with the Fulani rulers from the former capital of the kingdom, Rabá, were equally exempted from tax save for an annual 'salute' to the *Etsu*. To the people of *ba nin* the people of Greater Bida, Fulani and Nupe alike, are 'strangers'. But in the kingdom they themselves, *kintsozi*, Owners of the Land, were a group deprived of all privileges. They were taxed exactly as the other peasants in the country; and so also, by gate-tolls and market dues, which were collected by the king's police force, were all Nupe from the country who came to sell their goods in Bida market.

Finally, there are the strangers—'real' strangers—of whom this cosmopolitan capital was (and is) always full: people from Hausa and Bornu, Arabs from the Sudan and Tripoli, Yoruba from the south.

¹ These districts were: Cekpá (the country of Patigi), Gbakokpá (Badeggi and Kacha), Eggá, Beni, Kyedye, and Kusopa.

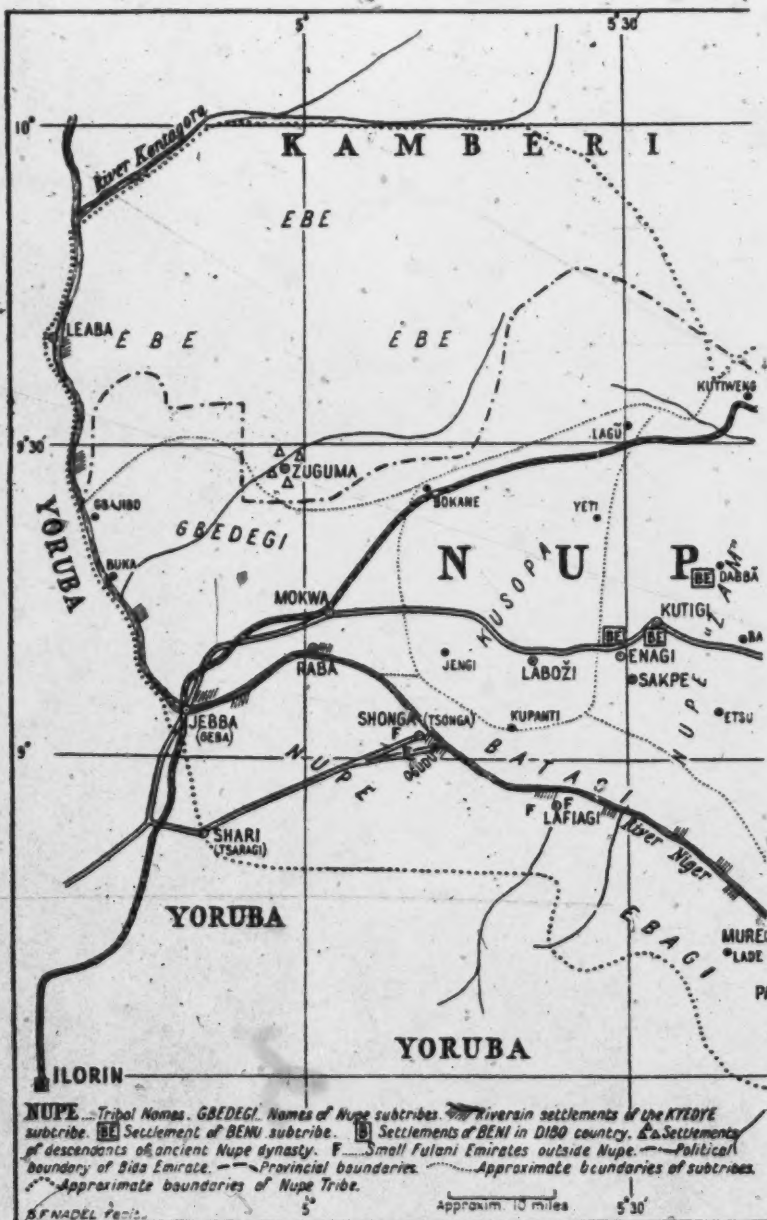
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1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

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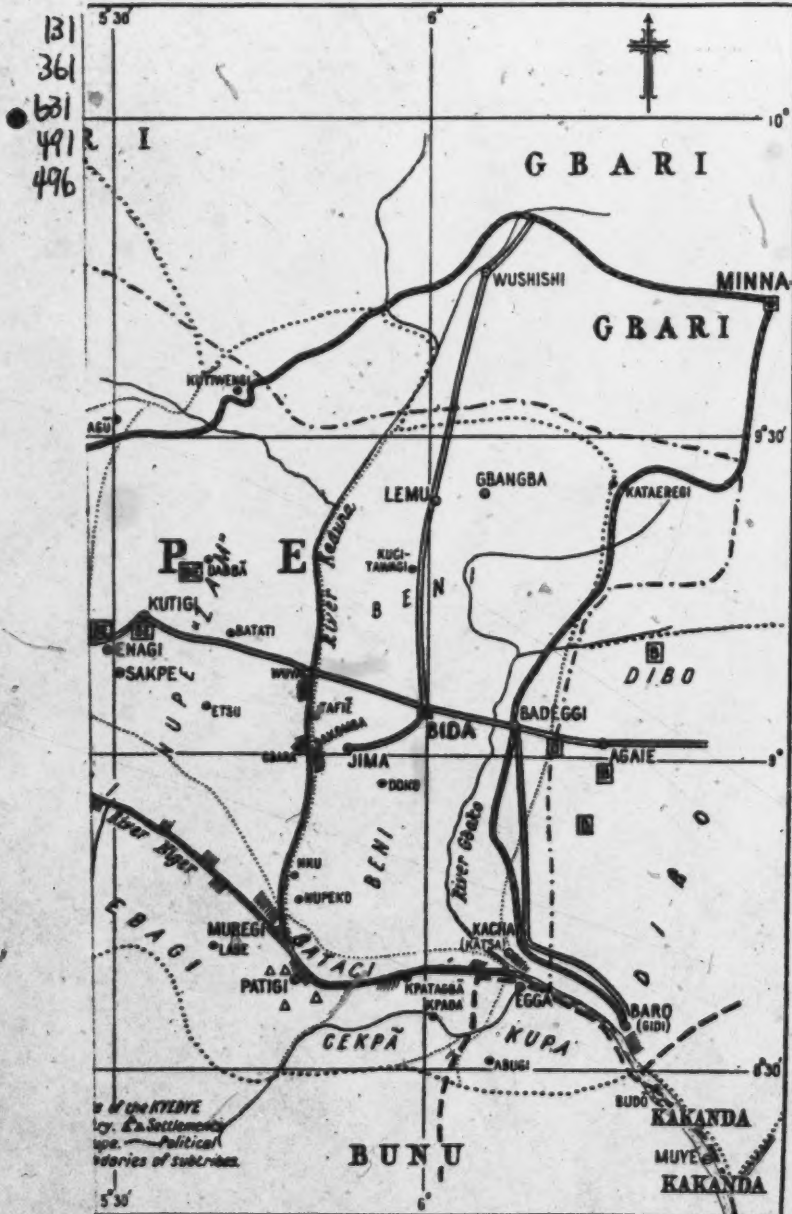


[END MAP I (A)]

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

FF52 Nupe FF52

MAP OF NUPE



[End Map I (8)]

THE NUPE

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565 Below the *sarakishi* comes a group of minor office-holders, heads of the Bida craft guilds, who receive their titles and the customary gift of a turban from the *Etsu*. The head of the Bida brokers, who acts as an agent for the king in trade and commercial matters in the capital, holds a similar position.

565 The lowest titled class in the Nupe social order is that of the *ena wufi*, whose members bear the titles of the former court slaves.¹² Formerly these titles were held by men of high birth captured in war and given titles in return for loyal service; they could rise in the service of the king as bodyguards, police, messengers, tax collectors, etc. A new king usually took over the officials of his predecessor.

565 Below the orders of title-holders come the commoners (*talakishi*), who constitute the great majority of the population.

PATRONAGE¹³

566 A system of patronage or clientship is an important feature of Nupe society.

675 The client (*bara*) attaches himself to the household of his patron as a servant or in some other capacity from which he may rise to the position of a trusted friend and may even marry into the patron's family. Clients may be divided into three categories: those who seek political protection without surrendering their independence, who do not work for their patron but are regarded rather as "adopted children"; those who are poor and anxious to avoid hard work on the land; and those who hope to achieve some eminence by attaching themselves to a man of position and influence. The clients of the royal princes may rise to high positions and eventually become the *bara* of a ruling king, their rank then being almost equal to that of the official nobility. Indeed, rich and ambitious men may even buy themselves a clientship in the house of a royal prince or of the king.

The system is beneficial to both parties, the client receiving material benefit and protection and possibly a title, and the patron acquiring servants, soldiers for the contingent he must provide for the king's army, and followers to add to his prestige.

AGE-SETS¹⁴

561 Boys and young men in a village or town are grouped in three graded associations: *ena wadgishi*, for boys between the ages of about 10 and 15; *ena dzakangishi*, of ages c. 15 to 20, and *ena gbarufishi*, of ages c. 20 to 30. Every age-set (*ena*) passes successively through these grades. Except in the capital, there is only one set or association in each grade within the local community at any one time. Each is led by an older man or by a boy from the highest rank of the next grade. The head of the highest, known as *ndakotsu*, is chosen from among adults and has considerable influence. The main emphasis within the age-sets is on seniority. Titles, often copying those for adults in the wider society, are distributed by the leader on the basis of reputation, ability, and merit, sometimes anticipating the future rank of the holder. Those acquired in the highest grade may be retained by the young man for life. The chief public functions of the sets lie in the execution of co-operative tasks, but they also have a recreational side.

For girls, an association (*ena*) exists only for the lowest age-set.

GOVERNMENT¹⁵

631 Prior to the more recent developments of local government, the Nupe kingdom was divided into four zones for the purposes of political, judicial, and tax administration. The first was the territory of the conquered and tributary "outside" peoples; the second, within the boundaries of the kingdom proper, included the

¹² For a description of slavery proper, see below, p. 41.

¹³ Nadel, 1942, pp. 122-7.

¹⁴ Nadel, op. cit., pp. 383-401; 1935a, pp. 209-71, 292.

¹⁵ Nadel, 1942, pp. 115-18.

83) countries of Beni and Kyedye; the third comprised a wider ring of remaining towns and districts of the kingdom, mostly in Trans-Kaduna; the fourth was Bida town, the seat of the central government, which formed an administrative district of its own.

The "outside" peoples consisted of Yoruba (Yagba and Bunu), Kakanda, Kamben, Gbari, and Gbira, with some Nupe sections (mostly Dibo and Ebe). Their districts were not regularly administered by the central government, but they were recognized as being under the "protection" of Bida, and paid an annual tribute in slaves, collected by royal agents (*tuci* or *ajele*). Other Emirates and chieftainships were bound by "treaties" not to raid Bida's dependent territories, though Bida itself could raid its own "outside" peoples. The royal messengers visited the territories with small armies and the possession of such a force was an essential qualification for the post of *ajele*.

The kingdoms of Beni and Kyedye,¹⁸ the two small "states within the State," were directly under the king and their chiefs acted as a kind of royal agents, their appointment and succession being subject to confirmation by the king. They could administer law in cases which came into the category of *gyara*, "reparation," and collected tax in their areas on the king's behalf.

The rest of the Nupe kingdom was divided into areas each containing a town with its dependent villages and *tunga*, which were administered as fiefs by their lords (*egba*). The latter might be members of the royal house or of the official nobility, or court slaves. Each received his fief from the *Etsu*, together with his title with which the fief remained permanently linked; the appointment to an *egba* post thus conferred a definite status. Fiefs were also bestowed on individuals, usually relatives or favourites of the king, independent of rank or office. A lord rarely visited his fief; his representative, usually one of his slaves or serfs living on his lands, collected tax for him. The *egba* had to give a proportion of this tax to the king. Among his other duties was the administration of justice in lesser cases.

633 Bida town was administered directly by the king and his officers of state, but, like the kingdom, was divided into areas, the inner city, where the Beni of pre-Fulani Bida lived, "greater" Bida, and the strangers' quarter. Cutting across these divisions were the small local units, described by Nadel as "factions rather than organized town wards," consisting of the followers of various members of the powerful nobility. In fact, the people of Bida refer to the different parts of the town by the titles of the nobility, who have their houses there.

In more recent times the affairs of Bida Emirate have been in the hands of the *Etsu* and a council of four, consisting of the *Ndeji*, President (formerly "father of the town" of Bida), the *Maiyaki* or *Sarkin Yaki*, Minister of Public Works (formerly Commander in War), the *Nágya*, formerly District Head of Mokwa and a member of the nobility, and the *Etsu Tafeyi*, official representative of the commoners and formerly chief of the Beni confederacy.¹⁹ Other officials include the *Gaki Seidi*, formerly the *Etsu's* chief slave and now the official messenger between the Emir's residence and the Divisional Office of the Nigerian Administration. Seven District Heads are appointed by the *Etsu* from the ranks of the higher royal nobility. 634 Exceptions are the *Kuta* of the Kyedye sub-tribe,²⁰ who is the District Head of Kuta District, and the *Sheshi* of Kacha. The District Heads live in the largest town of their District and make frequent tours of inspection of the area and regular visits to the *Etsu*. They are responsible to the *Etsu* for law and order in their District and for the collection of taxes.²¹

635 648 The *Dikko*, head of the nomadic Fulani (*bororo*) in Bida Emirate, fills a traditional position in Fulani social life and ceremonial. He acts as liaison officer

¹⁸ See below, p. 38.

¹⁹ c. 1936.

²⁰ See below, p. 38.

²¹ Nadel, 1942, pp. 158-65.

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MAN

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sphere of influence of the *ledu*-organization, death penalty was executed, though in secrecy, by the people of the village themselves. But however this be, the actual issue is little affected. For even if there had existed this strong superstitious belief, the problem for us here is that it should be made use of in such a special way. The belief, the sentiments expressed in the belief, and the political institution in which they crystallise, are two entirely different things. The political system of Nupe kingdom, creating the *ledu*-organization, might actually only have adopted existing motives and ideas; but then it lent its own most sacred symbolism to their support, and at the same time formed out of their psychological appeal a rigid judicial monopoly, and a political office which almost comes to deny its origin: for the office of the *ledu* includes as we have seen also cases which have nothing more to do with death, namely the flogging of those who abused the name of the king; and ordinary flogging was done in every Nupe village. 693

III.

More than a hundred years of Mohammedan law, decades of civil war and political changes were not powerful enough to break the spiritual influence of the *ledu* institution, the belief in its oracles, and the sacredness of its office. But they have been able to obliterate certain details of its organization. One point in particular it is difficult to ascertain to-day: who was actually entitled to make use of the organization of 'Tsoede's hangmen'? 177 693

I found two different, and conflicting, interpretations. According to the first, the power of the *ledu* was limited to the river, and the authority over the *ledu* was, from Tsoede's time almost up till now, given into the hands of the chief of one section among the Nupe, the Kyedya. The people who call themselves Kyedya are the most powerful among the riverain Nupe. They are the canoe- and fishermen on the main river; they monopolize river traffic and trade, they look down upon their neighbours, and style themselves the 'Lords of the Waters.' They are united in a very strongly centralised political organization, and their head is the chief of Muregi, who holds the ancient hereditary title of *kwa*. The *kwa*, then, is said to be the legitimate head of the *ledu* organization. But a second version says that the office of the *ledu* comprised the whole country (or at least stretched inland as well), and that the power over the *ledu* belonged exclusively to the *etsu*, or kings, of the Nupe — the kings who were till the Fulani conquest the direct descendants of Tsoede. 174 105 693 631

Weighing evidence against evidence, the situation seems to be this:—Originally an organization of the Nupe king the *ledu* system was adopted later by the Kyedya. In the beginning the Nupe king alone was entitled to act through the *ledu* organization. Geographical and historical facts, reflected in the mythology of their ancestor-king, account for the connection with the river area: the territory of the young Nupe kingdom were the river banks. The river Niger, *adduma*, as the Nupe call it, 'Father Niger,' marks the path of the mythical Tsoede where he set out to unite the Nupe into a powerful kingdom. Even later, in historical times, when the Nupe state extended far across central Nigeria, the capitals always remained near the river: Gbara, Jima, Mokwa and Raba.⁴ But also economically the Niger was the life centre of the country. The welfare of a large section of the population depended on the river. And traffic and trade, so immensely important in Nupe culture, were bound up with the Niger. What appears, then, in the context of myth as the path of the ancestor-king of Nupe, plays in the actual tribal life the rôle of a 'King's Highway,' of a vital artery of the political and economic organism over which the king extends his own special, sacred authority. Violation of the law in this area means the violation of this sacredness; and crimes committed here became crimes of a special sort, subject to a special jurisdiction which has the meaning more of a sacred vengeance than of an ordinary punishment. 174 693 631 [36] [47]

When, however, during the Fulani wars the political centre moved away from the river, finally to Bida, the present capital of Nupe, the original organization of the *ledu* must have lost force and significance. And then it was, as our evidence points out, that the Kyedya claimed the title over the *ledu*. The power over the river was now theirs, unquestioned. The Kyedya, hostile to the Fulani invaders, always boasting with their ancient lordship over the waters, and regarding themselves still in the days of British rule as equal to the king of Bida, seized this organization which seemed a

⁴ See the map in my article on Nupe State and Community (AFRICA, VIII, 3).

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631 weapon so well suited to their hands. And in their small 'state within the state' this jurisdiction
693 over the 'King's Highway' was still working, a true if smaller copy of the old system, some thirty
or forty years ago.

IV.

681 The *ledu* villages are, as we have seen, linked with the king's person by special sacred links;
693 they are made to share the king's guardianship over the law; they thus visibly represent, and almost
642 propagate, the supreme power of the king at what we are tempted to call 'strategic' places. And
in this, it seems to me, an important general sociological issue is involved. Strict centralization
of legal power, however strong a machinery for political integration it seems, always harbours a
dissintegrative element as well. For it tends to separate the crime as actually committed from the
final act of justice. The element of retaliation and atonement, so essential to the savage mind,
becomes meaningless where the criminal is tried and punished a hundred miles away, and
by people who are, practically, strangers. The individual community is deprived of one of the most
powerful elements of social cohesion, namely, the title to sanction the violation of its laws and of its
social order within its own boundaries. It appears to be the meaning of the *ledu* organization to
neutralize this influence for that vital area of the Niger valley. For the most conspicuous, final,
phase of jurisdiction is returned to a certain extent to the individual community. It is true
this applies only to a few selected places. But we remember their surprising regular distribution
on the river; and also the rule that the *ledu* village nearest to the place of the crime had to be called
upon to perform the execution. These villages are 'representative' places, and 'strategic' places,
and their selection is backed by the strongest charter: mythical and religious belief.

S. F. NADEL.

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